MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
HELD IN WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 2, 1941.

The third meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts during the fiscal year 1942 was held in its office in the Interior Department Building on Tuesday, September 2, 1941. The meeting was in the nature of a special meeting to consider a preliminary design for the new War Department Building in Arlington County, Virginia. The following members were present:

Mr. Clarke, Chairman,
Mr. Lamb,
Dr. Cret,
Mr. Holabird (vote by proxy)
also H. P. Caemmerer,

Secretary and Administrative Officer.

Mr. Holabird was reached by long distance telephone when he stated that it would be very difficult for him to attend the meeting but he would agree with the conclusions reached by Mr. Lamb and Dr. Cret.

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a. m.

1. DESIGN FOR NEW WAR DEPARTMENT BUILDING: The Chairman called attention to a meeting which he attended at the White House on Friday, September 29, and to an inspection trip to Arlington County as a result of which the President had decided that the new War Department Building should be built on the Quartermaster Depot site on Columbia Pike rather than on the old Arlington Experimental Farms area and that the building should house only 20,000 persons instead of 40,000 as originally proposed by the War Department. (A memorandum concerning the meeting at the White House was sent to each member of the Commission. (Exhibit A))

Mr. Edwin Bergstrom, consultant architect for the War Department, submitted preliminary drawings for a pentagonal building at the Quartermaster Depot site.

He submitted an elevation of the main facade, which would be 960 feet in length on each of the five sides, an elevation in detail, a perspective showing the proposed treatment of wings and courts and a location plan on a scale of 400 feet to the inch. Mr. Bergstrom was accompanied by three assistants: Pierpont Davis, Robert D. Farquhar and David Witmer. Mr. Bergstrom explained the drawings. He said the building will be three stories (60 feet) high and of permanent reinforced concrete construction. There will be no elevators, and in that respect the building will be similar to the Munitions Building on Constitution Avenue. The first floor covers the entire site except the interior court so that the interior wings and corridors are two stories high. The interior pentagonal court measures 360 feet on a side, the approximate length also of each of the interior wings. Mr. Bergstrom pointed out on the location scheme that there would be several additional roadways and a plaza in front of the main entrance. Buses would cross the Fourteenth Street Bridge and come to a basement entrance on the south side of the building. Mr. Lamb and Dr. Cret said that the building is so large--one side being only 90 feet less than the entire Department of Commerce Building, which is 1,050 feet long, that the question of proper circulation is a most important one. Mr. Lamb said a pentagonal has never worked out well and great confusion is apt to result in the circulation in this building.

Mr. Lamb preferred a rectangular building. Dr. Cret was of the opinion that in a huge plan like this the question of circulation becomes almost a city plan and a highway problem and that if one gets into the wrong corridor, he is lost. In the matter of the facade Mr. Lamb and Dr. Cret advise a restudy to show breaks which will add interest to the facade and do away with the monotonous appearance.

Mr. Bergstrom said cast stone is being considered for the exterior wall although limestone is being strongly urged by the limestone companies.

The location plan indicated that a building of about 3,500,000 square feet is proposed but that a large part of this will be for files and records. Mr. Bergstrom said one wing is to be without windows as an experiment for a files and records building. Part of the building will be air-conditioned. Office space is being provided for 20,000 employees. This will be the largest office building in the world.

Mr. Bergstrom said the new site will require pile foundations since years ago the ground was part of an inlet from the river (Roaches Run) and a short distance below the surface there is water ten feet deep. Parking space for 4,000 automobiles is provided in the old Hoover Airport site, which becomes part of the grounds for the building and space for 4,000 more cars is planned west of the building. Mr. Clarke said the grounds should be given a simple treatment, namely, large trees with grass.

Mr. Lamb and Dr. Cret requested that the design be given further study and that at the resubmission a plan for the first and upper stories be submitted; section or sections through a portion of the group and at least two elevations complete and one detail at a larger scale; also that the study should be carried out in part with models so that the various elements will be seen in proper relationship.

Mr. Bergstrom said he expects to have the revised plans ready for submission in about a week.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Clarke, Mr. Lamb and Dr. Cret met at the White House at the request of President Roosevelt and conferred with him concerning the design of the building. Suggestion that a rectangular scheme be

adopted was not favored by the President, who said a pentagonal building would be something different.

After conference the President requested a report from the Commission of Fine Arts concerning the design. This was submitted late in the afternoon. (Exhibit B) A copy of the report was sent to Brigadier General Brehon B. Somervell and to Mr. Bergstrom. (Exhibit C)

August 30, 1941.

Memorandum for the Commission of Fine Arts.

Subject: War Department Building, Arlington County.

The President definitely settled the controversy over the location of a building for the War Department at a meeting held yesterday at the White House, which was followed by an inspection on the grounds. The meeting was attended by the following: Brigadier General Brehon B. Somervell, representing the Secretary of War, Harold D. Smith, Budget Director, J. Downer, representing Mr. Frederic A. Delano, Chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and Gilmore D. Clarke, representing the Commission of Fine Arts.

The Secretary of War, the Chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Budget Director had already signed an agreement placing the proposed new War Department Building in the area immediately south of the southerly border of the Arlington Farm, noth of Columbia Pike and East of Military Road. This is an area of approximately 87 acres which the War Department purchased as a site for a Quartermaster Depot. Work on the Quartermaster Depot had started but was stopped a few days ago at the direction of the President. The Quartermaster Depot will be located south of Alexandria.

The terms of the agreement specified the approximate size of the building, to contain about 4,000,000 square feet, of fireproof construction, three stories in height, and to be faced with either lime-

EXHIBIT A

stone or cast stone aggregate. Building No. 2, just recently erected west of Military Road in Arlington County for the use of the Navy Department is to be turned over to the War Department. The Munitions Building on Constitution Avenue, now occupied by the War Department will be turned over for the use of the Navy Department.

The President stated that he was hopeful that the Northwest Rectangle would be completed so as to provide for permanent offices for the War and Navy Departments in that area after theemergency. He then visualized the removal of the Navy and Munitions Buildings south of Constitution Avenue and indicated that the proposed new War Department Building in Arlington County would be used for the storage of inactive Government files.

The erection of this large building in Arlington County will necessitate the construction of new roadways in Arlington County. The construction of these new arteries must go forward coincident with the construction of the War Department Building in order to insure that the twenty odd thousand employees may reach this new building conveniently. Representatives of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Public Roads Administration are engaged in making studies of this system of roads and it was indicated by Budget Director Smith and by General Somervell that funds would be made available immediately for the construction of these roads. Improvements to the street system of the District of

Columbia are also necessary, more particularly the so-called Maine Averue improvement between the Washington end of the Fourteenth Street bridge and the Government Printing Office, and also the improvements at the Washington end of the Key Bridge.

The President directed General Somervell to have the plans for the new War Department Building reviewed by the Commission of Fine Arts inspite of the fact that the General insisted that the area in which the building is to be built is outside of this Commission's jurisdiction.

A meeting of the architect members of the Commission will be called for Tuesday, September 2nd at 11:00 o'clock in Washington.

Gilmore D. Clarke.

COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
Washington

September 2, 1941.

Dear Mr. President:

The Commission of Fine Arts examined the elevations for the new War Department Building, submitted by Edwin Bergstrom, architect, in behalf of the War Department, on September 2, 1941.

Site: The Commission is greatly pleased with the new site proposed for the project. The important termination of the Central Composition is no longer endangered by the too close proximity of the overwhelming mass of building at one side of the Arlington Memorial Bridge. The facilities of approach are at least as good as in the first site proposed and the location can provide good elevations all around.

Plan: We feel that the scheme of interior circulation has not received an adequate solution--serving a population of over 20,000 residents this problem deserves the most careful consideration. The circulation is the great problem in a structure as large as this and should be most carefully studied, not only for the visitor's convenience in finding his way, but for communication between the various departments to save time and to increase efficiency. The plan also dictates the location of features of the elevations and deserves on these grounds alone the most careful consideration. No plan was presented to the Commission.

EXHIBIT B

Elevations: We realize that the elevations presented are very tentative and would undoubtedly be improved greatly with further study. We beg to call the attention of the architects on the lack of personality in the treatment as shown, the doubtful distribution of the breaks of these 960' facades, the need for some accents through the proper projection of the motives, and finally a more careful study of the proportions and forms.

The Commission would like to receive as soon as practicable: plan of first and upper stories; section or sections through a portion of the group; at least two elevations complete and one detail at larger scale.

Respectfully submitted:

For the Commission of Fine Arts.

(Signed) Gilmore D. Clarke,

Chairman.

The President,
The White House.

C O P Y

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
Washington

September 2, 1941.

My dear Mr. President:

In submitting the enclosed report on the War Department Building, we venture to suggest the possibility of making available to the architects the advice of a consulting architect of your choice to make suggestions toward improving in particular the elevations of the building.

This new building will stand by itself and by reason of its size the facades demand thorough and careful study in order that the structure may present the very best possible appearance. It would be wise, we believe, to have this study carried out in part with models to make sure that the various elements of the building are in good relation, one with another.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Gilmore D. Clarke,
Chairman.

The President,
The White House.

September 5, 1941

Brig. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, Chief
Construction Division
Office of the Quartermaster General
Washington, D. C.

Dear General Somervell:

For your information, I submit herewith a report of the Commission of Fine Arts on the subject of the War Department Building to be erected in Arlington County, preliminary sketches for which were presented by Mr. Edwin Bergstrom, Architect, in your behalf, at a special meeting of the Commission held September 2, 1941.

I am sending a copy of this report to Mr. Bergstrom.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Very truly yours,

Gilmore D. Clarke
Chairman

GDC:EJ
CC: Mr. Edwin Bergstrom
Mr. William A. Delano
Mr. H. P. Caemmerer

EXHIBIT C

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
September 2, 1941

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The Commission would like to receive as soon as practicable:- plan of first and upper stories; section or sections through a portion of the group; at least two elevations complete and one detail at larger scale.